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ABSTRACT

This document outlines the importance of open distance learning in a broad range of education and training activities for the European Community (EC) and its Member States. It refers to actions in this area already taking place and shows how EC programs complement and are complemented by actions in the open distance learning field being taken within the context of existing programs. The paper indicates a need for policies and actions at institutional and Member State level that would extend the scope, power, and application of open distance learning. It also refers to areas in which a sharing of experience and expertise and possible joint actions at the European level could be taken within the framework of the creation of trans-European infrastructural networks for vocational and professional training. (KC)

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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

COM(91) 388 final

Brussels, 12 November 1991

ED350386

MEMORANDUM

on

OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

in

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

(presented by the Commission)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Background

1. The importance of Open Distance Learning for the European Community was recognised by the European Parliament when it adopted a resolution on the Open universities in the European Community on July 10, 1987(1). Arising from a number of requests which the Parliament addressed to the Commission in the context of this resolution a preliminary document, defining priority areas for Community action in Open Distance Learning was prepared(2) and on May 24, 1991, the Commission approved a report on Open and Distance Higher Education in the European Community(3).

2. At the initiative of the Irish presidency on May 30, 1990, the Council discussed the possibilities for Community actions in the field of Open Distance Learning and requested the Commission to prepare proposals for such actions in close consultation with the Member States.

3. The establishment of a national experts group, whose members were nominated by the Governments and who represented the sectors both of education and vocational training in the Member States, has provided the opportunity to consider national priorities in Open Distance Learning and to indicate areas where Community action in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity would be warranted.

4. This memorandum details the importance of Open Distance Learning in a broad range of education and training activities for the Member States and for the European Community. It refers to actions in this area already and shows how Community programmes complement and are complemented by actions in the Open Distance Learning field being taken within the context of existing Community programmes. It indicates a need for policies and actions at institutional and Member State level which would extend the scope, power and application of Open Distance Learning and refers to areas where a sharing of experience and expertise and possible joint actions at European level could be taken with benefit within the framework of the creation of transEuropean infrastructural networks for vocational and professional training.

Investment in Education and Training - A Community Priority

5. There is a growing conviction that the European Community must invest heavily in its human capital if it is to be in a position to confront and master the challenges of the coming decades. This conviction has been born of the imminence of the completion of the internal Market, requiring for its success a whole new range of skills in management, communication and organisation. The measures taken by the Community in relation to the learning of languages and the promotion of mobility during training are designed to foster these skills.

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(1) Doc. A2 - 69/87

(2) Distance Education and Training.
Commission Staff Working Paper
SEC (90)479, 7 March 1990.

(3) Open and Distance Higher Education in the European Community. Report from the Commission, SEC (91) 897 Final, 24 May 1991.

6. The advances in science and technology and their application to enterprise, administration and to daily living serve to reinforce this conviction. These advances are rendering the skills and knowledge of the existing workforce obsolescent at an increasingly rapid rate, leading to a need for frequent retraining. They are also bringing about a shift towards an increasing knowledge content in work as industry becomes increasingly knowledge-based and knowledge-driven. As an consequence of this shift there is a perceived need for an upgrading of the qualifications of the labour force: Education and training are seen as prime determinants of economic success and fears are frequently expressed that investment in research and development and in technological improvement may not yield the expected returns without an accompanying effort in the development of human resources.(4)

7. Such an effort would also be warranted in order to remain competitive in the global market. The evidence available would indicate that the Community's major trading competitors in the developed world are concentrating very heavily, and to a greater extent than in Europe, on improving the skills and knowledge of their existing and potential labour force.

8. The demographic position in the European Community, wherein the numbers of young people available to renew the labour force over the next two decades are declining, also gives cause for concern. In these circumstances the economy cannot rely on new recruitment for the necessary injection of new knowledge and new skills and must look also to an increasing extent towards upgrading the qualifications of the existing workforce.

9. An increase in the rate of participation in the active labour force from among groups, hitherto underrepresented, must also be sought. A particular example of such a group would be women wishing to return to the labour force after some years exercising family responsibilities. It will be necessary to provide training so that such groups will have access to skills and knowledge of a kind which will be in demand on the labour market.

10. The last decade has been marked by significant skill shortages in the Community even while unemployment continued to rise. This apparent paradox is the outcome of a fast rate of job destruction/job creation in an economy undergoing rapid transformation and modernisation. In the midst of this change it was evident that the better educated and qualified, who could more readily adapt to changing work requirements, enjoyed greater job stability and higher living standards. It is in the light of such a situation that the Community is proposing a right of access to continuing training for workers in companies(5).

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(4) Skills Shortages in Europe. Irdac Opinion (Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee of the Commission of the European Communities), November 1990.

(5) Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, Article 15.

11. The dependence of new enterprise on qualified and skilled manpower for its success is a major consideration in the context of structural policies. For this reason the structural funds have strongly supported training and retraining measures in the regions of the Community and in areas where traditional industries are undergoing significant economic restructuring. Actions of this kind are likely to assume an increasing importance in rural areas as a result of evolving agricultural policies.

12. All of the foregoing factors argue compellingly for :

- increasing the level of qualification of new entrants to the workforce;
- updating and upgrading the qualifications of the existing workforce through continuing education and training;
- providing training of a kind which will lead to increased rates of participation in the labour force among hitherto underrepresented groups;
- securing a greater synergy between education and training and economic life so as to ensure the relevance, balance and capability of application of skills and knowledge.

13. The achievement of the foregoing objectives calls for more varied, more open and more flexible structures of education and training. These structures would need to be designed in accordance with the needs of clients and to be adaptable to their employment, social and educational circumstances. Open Distance Learning is seen as a key component in the creation of such structures.

The Potential of Open Distance Learning

14. By "Open Learning" is meant any form of learning which includes elements of flexibility which make it more accessible to students than courses traditionally provided in centres of education and training. This flexibility arises variously from the content of the course and the way in which it is structured, the place of provision, the mode, medium or timing of its delivery, the pace at which the student proceeds, the forms of special support available and the types of assessment offered (including credit for experiential learning). Very often the "openness" is achieved, in part at least, by the use of new information and communications media.

15. "Distance Learning" is defined as any form of study not under the continuous or immediate supervision of tutors, but which nevertheless benefits from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organisation. Distance learning has a large component of independent or autonomous learning and is therefore heavily dependent on the didactic design of materials which must substitute for the interactivity available between student and teacher in ordinary face to face instruction. The autonomous component is invariably supported by tutoring and counselling systems which ideally are provided at regional/local study centres and to an increasing extent by modern communications media. Because open distance learning is meant to be adaptable to the pace of the student the material is generally structured in units or modules geared to specific learning outcomes.

    The presence of a strong autonomous component in Open Distance Learning is very much in keeping with the ideas current in higher education of making students more responsible for attaining their own learning objectives.

16. The achievements in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT) have contributed to the rapid development of open distance learning.
    The advent of telecom services such as data networks and access to on-line databases, had a revolutionary impact on the way in which information can be stored and retrieved. A growing information services market, world-wide, is featuring now many products and services.
    The development of videotext services across Europe (Minitel in France, Prestel in the UK, various services in Spain, Italy and Portugal etc), has given the possibility of low cost data access to the large public, while at the same time, totally new services have emerged, based solely at the new technology of telematics. At the same time, new products, based on ICT present the user with numerous possibilities, especially for the use of training purposes.
    Interactive multimedia technologies make interaction possible with the trainee without the direct and constant intervention of a human tutor

17. The extraordinary potential of Open Distance Learning arises from the freedom it enjoys from constraints of time, place and pace. This endows it with an extensive flexibility which makes it readily adaptable to the needs of the consumer. It has particular appeal to the working population as it can be geared to make minimum intrusion into the requirements of the job. Training leave can be taken with particular regard to the needs of production and the use of Open Distance Learning enables the value of such leave to be maximised. Open Distance Learning can be used on its own or as a component of other learning systems. It can be used by individuals widely dispersed or by concentrated groups. It can reach across the boundaries of regions, countries and continents. It has an extremely wide range of application either on its own or in conjunction with conventional education and training systems.(6)

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(6) Full interactive multimedia technologies use normally a well-tempered personal computer workstation, which may be boosted to a full interactive multimedia machine with the addition of an audio processor card, interactive video, and image manipulation mechanisms via Graphical User Interfaces. Optical disc technology (laservision and compact-disc) offers low costs mass data storage, while at the same time it features characteristics like high quality sound and image. Thus, Videodiscs are currently used in many interactive multimedia training applications around Europe, while CD-ROM (Compact-Disc Read-Only Memory) is also a competitive cost-effective alternative. Digital Video Interactive (DVI) is needed when a standard business PC is to form the basis of a multimedia training system. CD-I (Compact Disc - Interactive) is a unique new system, designed for the consumer and the training markets of the '90's. Capable of handling image, texts, sound and graphics, CD-I offers also an excellent media for language handling, since it features a unique 16-sound channel possibility. CDTV (Compact Disc Televison) is another multimedia system, aimed at low cost applications. Last but not least, Satellite Television is capable of delivering not only linear but also interactive training materials, which may be encoded and recorded on magnetic storage media, then decoded and ready-for-use. One has also to stress that the development of new software tools is expected to greatly enhance the possibilities of the present and future multimedia hardware.

18. The following areas of education/training provision are identified as ones where Open Distance Learning can play a highly significant role :

- extending opportunities of access to and participation in education and training at all levels;
- strengthening the education/training infrastructure of less favoured regions and of remote areas by extending the range of training available in institutions and directly to individuals and groups;
- creating trans-European networks for training and hence creating a greater cohesion of the European education and training systems using "clearing houses" and "transfer points" for exchange in the field of open distance learning;
- providing continuing education and training for the workforce;
- improving the quality of training programmes through the incorporation of external high quality inputs and by utilising multimedia competence;
- consolidating partnerships in training both within and between Member States and as between institutions and industry;
- supporting the reconversion and innovation of education and training in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe;
- delivering advanced training and disseminating the results of research;
- making available a European dimension in the education/training of those who do not have the opportunity to spend a period of study abroad and, in particular, providing such a dimension in the inservice training of teachers;
- teaching about the European Community, its laws, institutions and policies on a world-wide basis;
- providing Europe-wide education and training programmes on a competitive basis.

The Position of Open Distance Learning in the Member States

19. During the past two decades major efforts have been made to promote Open Distance Learning as a means of education and training, particularly for the adult population. These efforts have resulted, in some countries, in the creation of Open Distance Learning facilities as departments attached to existing university level institutions. In others, such as Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Portugal, separate and independent open/distance teaching universities were established. The size and sophistication of these systems differ widely as does the extent to which they are integrated with institutional educational structures. They are described in detail in the Commission's recent communication on this issue. The principal public developments in the Open Distance Learning areas have been at the level of higher education and advanced training, offering main courses principally of university degree level and updating courses of an advanced technological nature to postgraduate students already employed in enterprise.

20. In some Member States specialised institutions and national associations for applying Open Distance Learning in the field of vocational training are playing an important role in meeting skills needs.

Examples of these are FUNDESCO in Spain, FUNDETEC in Portugal and CNAM and CNED in France. An important development is the creation of training partnerships between enterprises and institutions for vocational training, using Open Distance Learning methods. In the overall, however, there is little evidence of serious public development in the application of Open Distance Learning to levels of basic education or to vocational training at the non-advanced levels(7) There is considerable private enterprise interest in the development of multimedia packages in the area of non-advanced vocational training and these packages can be used in an Open Distance Learning mode. Their principal usage is in large enterprise and in multi-branch firms in the services sector. Available information would indicate that the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Open Distance Learning, as in continuing education, remains to be developed.

(7) With the exception of Portugal where the National TV provides for basic education on the 5th and 6th levels.

21. Over the last decade a number of European-based organisations have become the focal points for development in the Open Distance Learning field. The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) is representative of these establishments in twelve European countries. EUROPACE is a group of high technology companies and universities developing satellite-based continuing training. EUROSTEP is an association of users of satellites in education and training programmes. " Channel e " is a television service, delivering satellite broadly educational and informative programmes, while carrying-out a number of research tasks on technical specifications. SATURN brings together open and distance teaching univesities and enterprises, notably certain SMEs. There is also an Association of European Correspondence Schools (AECS) that represents in particular the private providers of distance education. These organisations have been stimulated by the Commission in the context of existing Community programmes aimed at promoting greater cooperation in education and training. The activities of these organisations would reinforce the impression that many Open Distance Learning developments are directed at higher level studies.

22. There are aspects of Open Distance Learning that are penetrating conventional education and training structures to an increasing extent. In particular, the development of cheaper hardware and more powerful software tools have meant that multimedia and networking approaches, which characterise Open Distance Learning, are being increasingly adopted as teaching tools in many different types and levels of education and training establishment or will be soon within its reach. The didactic principles underlying Open Distance Learning of carefully structuring course content into units or modules relating to specific learning outcomes are also engaging the attention, particularly of higher education institutions. They see in this approach a means of making students more responsible for their own learning and of creating course structures which would answer to the needs of increasing permeability, facilitating the mobility of students between courses, institutions and countries and catering for growing numbers of continuing education students. There are some instances of distance teaching being applied to making external inputs of high quality into conventional teaching programmes. Notwithstanding these developments the level of integration between Open Distance Learning and traditional educational structures is not very strong and the mixing of these different modes as part of an overall approach to supplying education and training needs is not much in evidence. The emergence of the common ground and common interest already outlined could, nevertheless, be instrumental in bringing about a desirable level of integration.

23. The restriction in the level and range of Open Distance Learning opportunities also constitutes a serious problem. It is most important that such opportunities be extended to cover the needs and priorities of Member States, enterprises and individuals. Given the heterogeneity of the populations to be catered for in education and training and the variety of modes by which this will be necessary, a more extensive provision in the areas of science, technology, business studies and languages would appear to be required. This provision would need to embrace levels lower than that of a university degree. The important technician area, which is in the frontline of technological change at an operations level, must be catered for, at least at upper secondary level and particularly within the framework of continuing education and training. So too must the craft area, where multiskilling has become the typical response to changing production requirements. Non-advanced further education and training on an Open Distance Learning basis also needs widespread development to cater for workers who are seeking to update their skills or to improve their qualifications within the context of educational leave. Member States who are endeavouring to strengthen their provision of basic education by increasing participation at the upper secondary level and by extending the range of studies, particularly by incorporating vocational and technological components, may find in Open Distance Learning a way of solving some of their problems.

24. There is a very wide variety of actors involved with Open Distance Learning and it would seem likely that this range will be extended in the future. They will come from different levels and types of educational institutions, from training institutions within the employment sector, from publishing companies, from the social partners and from enterprises who are producers, transmitters and consumers of Open Distance Learning products. To meet the various needs for coordination more than one body for this purpose should be envisaged. Major efforts of coordination will be required to give structure and standing to Open Distance Learning within the regions and the Members States, to maintain standard and quality and to ensure complementarity between the roles of public and private enterprise in this area. Substantial initiatives will be required in assessing the needs and demands for Open Distance Learning, in developing the necessary delivery systems and their accompanying technology, in providing the counselling , tutorial and interactive support that students require in their studies and in ensuring a level of recognition in terms of credits and qualifications which would be on a par with those achieved through conventional studies and which would take account of experiential learning. The formation of partnerships between institutions and enterprises, the creation of networks involving producers and consumers, the formation of

consortia for the delivery of total training packages, the creation of advisory structures for SMEs and for sectors which would also have responsibility for the assessment of training needs and the commissioning of the necessary training, all of these are strategies which would support the permeation of Open Distance Learning in an effective and economic manner.

25. Much remains to be done also in clarifying Member State policies towards the financing of Open Distance Learning. Primary questions regarding the rationale for and the level of public subsidy need to be resolved as does also the balance of any such subsidy between the producer and the consumer. Equality of opportunity would appear to imply that those who wish to avail themselves of educational and training opportunities through Open Distance Learning should not be disadvantaged as a result of this choice. Social policy considerations may well dictate the terms under which Open Distance Learning is made available to groups such as the unemployed, people suffering from disability, people residing in remote areas, or workers whose livelihood is under threat. It is important that Open Distance Learning should find a place in any training policies envisaged to support industries undergoing transformation due to new technology or to help the regions catch up in terms of knowledge and skills as a development strategy. The manpower situation in the coming decades may well produce an environment where a mixture of work and training, with components of Open Distance Learning, may be much more the norm for many young people.

The interest of the European Community in Open Distance Learning

26. The interest of the European Community in Open Distance Learning arises from a recognition of the contribution which it can make to the achievement of the objectives of education and training policies in the Member States and in the Community as a whole and the extent to which this contribution can be enhanced by cooperative action. There are a number of characteristics of Open Distance Learning which make it amenable to cooperative action. First of all there is the cost structure where the development and production of courseware and the establishment of delivery systems and of supportive facilities for students require relatively high initial investment. Notably in the Community regions with a less-developed educational infractructure, substantial investments might be needed for this purpose, like the establishment of demonstration and student support centres, and of telecommunication networks. However, once fixed costs are met, the marginal costs per student are rapidly decreasing. Economies of scale are therefore an important consideration in Open Distance Learning and the more widespread the use of the materials the more economic the operation becomes. Cost is also related to the rate of obsolescence of material and it is important in the design of courseware that obsolescence can be corrected for without unnecessary discard.

27. Open Distance Learning is in some respects independant of national boundaries and this can contribute to the enlargement of the potential market and thus assist the economies of scale. It is also an important consideration in relation to the inclusion of a European dimension in the education and training provided. The quality of Open Distance Learning provision can gain appreciably from a sharing of expertise and a pooling or licensing of resources as between institutions, enterprises, networks and Member States. In the larger European Internal Market there will be competition between Open Distance Learning providers and this can also lead, in certain circumstances, to an improvement in the quality of product.

28. The Community's interest in Open Distance Learning is accentuated by the completion of the Internal Market where the four freedoms of movement of goods, services, people and capital are guaranteed under the provisions of the Treaty. The freedom to offer services across the boundaries of Member States has strong implications for the internationalisation of Open Distance Learning and for the development of a transnational market in Open Distance Learning products and services. The measures announced in the Commission's Green Paper on Satellite communication[8] could have the effect of improving access to European telecommunication systems for public and private Open Distance Learning providers as well as for consumers.

(8) Towards Europe-wide systems and services. Green Paper on a common approach in the field of Satellite Communication in the European Community COM (90) 490, 20 November 1990.

The encouragement of exchange of experience; the provision of information about Open Distance Learning products and services, the translation and adaptation of materials, movement towards standardisation or compatibility of systems, harmonisation of copy and exploitation rights, the joint creation of products - all of these factors would support the development of a Europe-wide market in Open Distance Learning. It is important that local structures and support facilities for students should not be tied to local or national producers in such a way as to inhibit the operation of such a market. While a free market would promote competition between Open Distance Learning providers in Europe it raises also the question of quality assurance and the protection of consumers in this field who purchase services across the boundaries of Member States.

29. Mutual recognition of qualifications achieved through Open Distance Learning will also be an important issue in order to facilitate mobility for further study and employment and in particular on account of the international nature of the market. The general directive on mutual recognition of qualifications leading to a registered profession(9) is based on completion of a course of at least three years' duration. At first sight this use of course duration as a central factor in according mutual recognition seems to pose a problem for Open Distance Learning, where the mastery of a set of learning objectives is the criterion for completion and where credit for experiential learning can form part of the assessment. However, in actual fact the general directive is compatible, without the need for amendment, with Open Distance Learning in that it makes provision for recognition between Member States not only of professional education and training of at least three years' duration at higher-education level, but also of all other types of education and training which are recognised by the Member State in which they are offered as being of an equivalent level and confer the same rights in respect of the pursuit of the regulated profession concerned.(10)

30. In order to promote a balanced development of education and training systems in all regions of the Community and hence to create a greater cohesion of European education and training systems, the Commission has defined Open Distance Learning as one of the priority projects for a Community action programme on trans-European networks.(11)

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(9) Council Directive 89/48/EEC of 21 December 1988 on a general system for the recognition of higher-education diplomas awarded on completion of professional education and training of at least three years' duration. OJ No L 19 of 24 January 1989, p.16.

(10) cf. last paragraph of Article 1(a) of the Directive.

(11) Towards Trans-European Networks, For a Community Action Programme, COM (90) 585 final, 10 December 1988.

Complementarity of Open Distance Learning with existing Community Programmes

31. As part of its efforts to promote initial and continuing education the Commission has viewed Open Distance Learning as an activity which complements a number of existing and ongoing Community programmes. Its relationship to these programmes is as follows :

32. ERASMUS(12)

This is a programme of interuniversity cooperation and mobility. When first conceived the programme envisaged a study abroad period for 10% of all students as a means of providing a European dimension in their education. Open Distance Learning is seen as one means of providing a European dimension for the remaining 90% and, in particular for teachers on an inservice basis. It can also provide a means of reaching adult and part-time students. The ECTS pilot programme which is part of ERASMUS is concerned with the mutual recognition of qualifications and could be of value in addressing the problems of recognition and equivalence arising within the Open Distance Learning area.

33. LINGUA(13)

This programme is designed to support the efforts of the education and training systems in the Member States in increasing the linguistic competence of young people and employees all over Europe. Given the extensive use of Open Distance Learning in the language field it is clear that it has the potential to make a major contribution to the objectives of this programme, on condition that quality standards are kept up. Specific contributions could be envisaged in preparing students prior to spending a period of study abroad in extending the teaching and learning of the lesser taught and lesser used Community languages.

34. COMETT(14)

Within the COMETT programme Open Distance Learning has been employed as an important means of delivering continuing training in advanced technologies. The programme has a clear strategy for developing models for training partnerships between Open Universities and industry and is supporting such partnerships on a pilot basis in the provision of Europe-wide delivery structures and in the production of training materials.

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(12) OJ No. L166 25.06.87 p.20
OJ No. L395 30.12.90 p.23

(13) OJ No. L239 16.08.89 p.24

(14) OJ No. L013 17.01.89 p.28

35. TEMPUS[15]

In the TEMPUS programme for the development of higher education in Central and Eastern Europe, the Open and Distance Teaching universities are developing cooperative ventures, such as the establishment of European study centres in the major cities of Central and Eastern European countries[16]

36. EUROTECNET[17]

This programme provides for actions concerning changes in initial and continuing training policies arising from identification of new skills needs in the workforce as a result of technological change. Training methodologies based on Open Distance Learning will figure increasingly in this programme.

37. FORCE[18]

The FORCE programme aims to support and complement the policies and activities developed by Member States to promote access to and participation in continuing vocational training. It will also be concerned with the contribution that Open Distance Learning can make to innovative training approaches for adult learners in firms.

38. DELTA[19]

Through the DELTA programme the Community has been pursuing research into the potential of technological development for learning purposes. This research concerns, in particular, the cooperative development of advanced learning technologies. It is also concerned with testing and validating the operation of these technologies in terms of securing higher standards, compatibility and cost reductions which would make them available to the educational market at reasonable price.

39. THE THIRD FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT[20]
This programme provides for six main activities within which are a number of specific programmes. Continuing action in the field of distance learning will be supported within the action entitled "Telematics Systems in Areas of General Interest : Flexible and Distance Learning ".
Its aim is paving the way for the implementation of telematic networks through pre-competitive and pre-normative research and development.

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(15) OJ No. L131 23.05.90 p.21
(16) The very recent (May) 1991 creation of the Budapest Platform for East-West collaboration on distance education may increase the opportunities for cooperation in this field.
(17) OJ NO. L393 30.12.89 p. 29
(18) OJ NO. L156 21.06.90 p. 1
(19) OJ NO. L206 30.07.89 p.20
(20) OJ No.L 117/28 08.05.90

40. STRUCTURAL FUNDS

Within the framework of the Structural Funds, Open Distance Learning will contribute in particular to the Community initiatives such as EUROFORM(21), HORIZON(23), and NOW(22).

41. EUROPEAN OPEN UNIVERSITY

Recent years have seen the emergence of various proposals for the establishment of a European Open University. Given the substantial investment already made in existing open and distance teaching institutions and also the motivation which they have shown to cooperate with each other, the Commission supports the idea that the aims and objectives of a European Open University would be best achieved through networking amongst the existing institutions rather than by creating a new institution as such . Consequently, it has supported them being the focal points for delivering open and distance teaching, in particular, through a planned programme of joint development of new European level courses as well as collaborative actions for course and credit transfer amongst those institutions.

For exemple, supported by several Community Programmes, the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) is developing open learning modules concerning European integration which are suitable for incorporation into academic courses both of the Open and Distance Teaching Universities and of conventional institutions.

Specific Fields for Actions

Taking into consideration the specific role and responsibilities of the Member States with regard to open and distance education and training and the Community's concern to promote a balanced development in this field in all parts of Europe, the Commission has defined positive developments that should be encouraged and promoted

42. Actions by Member States to reinforce the necessary training infrastructures in the less favoured, remote and rural zones of the Community. The increased utilisation of open and distance education and training in these Community regions could improve considerably access to education and training.

Creation of local/regional study support centres has proven to be an efficient tool aiming to :

- link distance teaching institutions with regional training consortia in particular for meeting training needs for local industry;

- introduce and demonstrate open and distance learning materials and systems to raise the awareness of the potential of open distance learning in local industrial circles;

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(21) OJ No. C327 29.12.90 p.3

(23) OJ No. C327 29.12.90 p.9

(22) OJ No. C327 29.12.90 p.5

- provide learner support (s.a. counselling and tutoring) at local level for students, particularly the personnel of companies lacking such support structures inside the company concerned;

- distribute and deliver open learning materials (from national and international producers) on a local level.

43. Actions at Community level to promote the development of a supply of open learning materials for Europe-wide delivery, geared notably to the training needs of SMEs in particular in key sectors of industrial importance.

Benefitting from and based on the experience and expertise of the COMETT programme and the Europe-wide COMETT UETP network, but also exploiting the achievement of Member States in this field (such as the UK "Open Tec" programme), the Community should encourage :

- pilot schemes in open and distance learning initiated by professional or industrial groupings for the benefit of company personnel; such schemes may be based either on new training courses and materials or on the adaptation of proven existing course material to meet the requirements of the new target audience;

- sectorally-focussed training actions in fields of strategic importance for the Community economy, preferably as international joint ventures between distance teaching institutions and companies concerned;

- schemes for the support and evaluation of model distance training developed by large companies for the benefit of supplier companies.

44. Actions to encourage and to support transnational cooperation between current and potential providers of open and distance learning in order to promote wider exploitation of training products.

In this regard, the Community should encourage :

- adaptation of such products to meet local requirements, notably linguistic and cultural;

- establishment of transnational tele-communication structures for information exchange and course delivery, exploiting also the modern tele-communication and information technology, such as satellite communication and telematic networks;

- training measures directed at trainers in order to develop and to improve their utilisation of open and distance training methods so as to develop a case of good practice;

- clearing-house activities designed for information exchange on open and distance teaching opportunities and products and the creation of databanks in this field, for promotion of quality and standards of training products and delivery systems and for accreditation of open and distance courses and their evaluation.

45. Specific actions within the ERASMUS programme concerning the promotion of distance teaching in the ERASMUS inter-university cooperation programmes (ICPs) aiming in particular at :

    - creating extra opportunities for students in Europe to add a European dimension to their curriculum by studying distance courses from abroad;

    - promoting collaboration between distance teaching universities and conventional universities in Europe for the development of common curricula;

    - providing opportunities for adults and/or part-time students (who are not able to move abroad for a longer period) to participate in the ERASMUS programme;

    - improving the quality of higher education by enabling external high level teaching expertise to be incorporated into programmes and by developing multimedia competence in higher education institutions.

46. The Commission would also profit from aditional experience to be gained from these Community actions in order to take stock of the appropriate research and development applications, involving the latest achievements in the field of technology-based learning, making full use of information and communication technologies and establishing synergies with the different Community R&D programmes. This cross-fertilising procedure would enable the Commission and the Member States to assist existing distance education and training centres in Europe in achieving greater interconnection in order to be able to get the most out of their experience.

    The Commission would also work towards promoting cooperative activities between the training education and R&D Community programmes in the field of common standards, inter-operability of software and compatibility between the hardware systems and the training methodologies.

47. The Europe-wide delivery of open distance learning courses in an open market urges for measures regarding the quality promotion and the consumers protection.

48. The open market equally requires community measures to harmonize copyright and neighbouring rights. Copyright provides a basis for intellectual creation. To protect copyright is to ensure that creativity is sustained and developed, in the interest of authors, the cultural sector, consumers, the educational system and ultimately of society as a whole. Neighbouring rights underpin these objectives in various ways, particularly by guaranteeing a proper return to those who invest in the provision of these cultural goods and services.

The completion of the internal market requires that authors and other right holders will find an identical level of protection at least comparable if they wish to exploit their rights in other Member States. Thus the conferring of a right and the practical management of that right are more and more closely bound up together.

The changes which technological advance has brought make it urgently necessary to strengthen the protection of copyright and neighbouring rights.

A series of legislative actions, studies and other actions are currently being prepared.(24) The main decisions and directives are to be adopted by 31 December 1992.

Conclusion

49. In drawing up this Memorandum, the Commission has taken note of the views of the Education Ministers as expressed at the Council meetings on May 31, 1990 in Brussels and on November 8, 1990 in Siena. It has closely considered the opinion and advices of the National Experts group on open and distance learning that had been established on request of the Council. It has also benefitted from the studies made by experts on behalf of the Commission and from the studies and reports from the Council of Europe and of the OECD.

The Commission is convinced that open and distance learning could play a vital role to improve access to education and training for all European citizens. On the basis of the discussions, the Council and the Ministers in charge of education and training policies could request the Commission to undertake specific policies and actions in this field at Community level.

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(24) Green Paper or Copyright and the Challenge of Technology (COM (88) 172 FINAL of June 1988) and the follow-up to the Green Paper : Working Programme of the Commission in the field of Copyright and neighbouring rights (COM(90) FINAL of 17 January 1991).